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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effects of school desegregation by court ordered busing on the subsequent dropout rate of majority and minority students. It also investigates the relationship of school socio-economic composition and teachers' expectations. The hypothesis of the study is that with the influence of school socio-economic composition considered, the more favorable attitudes of teachers toward minority students in desegregated schools will be reflected in a more satisfying minority student school experience. This will decrease the minority student dropout rate. Data collected for the study are part of a larger four-year longitudinal panel study of majority and minority student achievement and self-concept in a southwestern community with a population which is approximately 65% anglo, 20% black, and 15% Mexican American. Using the before and after busing measures of dropout rates, school records and personal interviews, this research finds majority dropout rates are not effected by desegregation procedures. While the dropout rates of bused minority students appear to be identical to that of non-bused minority students, large disparities between minority rates in various bused sectors indicate highly uneven educational experiences of bused minority students. A conclusion of this study is that the more favorable expectations of teachers at higher socio-economic climate schools produce lower minority student dropout rates. (Author/AM)

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THE EFFECTS OF BUSING AND SCHOOL DESEGREGATION ON MAJORITY AND MINORITY STUDENT DROPOUT RATES: AN EVALUATION OF SCHOOL SOCIO-ECONOMIC COMPOSITION AND TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluates the effects of school desegregation by court ordered busing on the subsequent dropout rate of majority and minority students. Using before and after busing measures of dropout rates, school records and personal interviews, this research finds majority dropout rates are not effected by desegregation procedures. While the dropout rates of bused minority students appear to be identical to those of non-bused minority students, large disparities between minority rates in various bused sectors indicate highly uneven educational experiences of bused minority students. School socio-economic composition and the expectations of teachers concerning student behavior are used to analyze the disparities with the conclusion reached that the more favorable expectations of teachers at higher socio-economic climate schools produce lower minority student dropout rates. Desegregation produces a positive benefit for this most crucial dimension of minority student educational accomplishment, when the school to which the minority student is bused is one where teachers' expectations are positive and supportive.

THE EFFECTS OF BUSING AND SCHOOL DESEGREGATION ON MAJORITY AND MINORITY STUDENT DROPOUT RATES: AN EVALUATION OF SCHOOL SOCIO-ECONOMIC COMPOSITION AND TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS

RESEARCH PROBLEM

While the greater equality of educational opportunity provided minority students in desegregated schools is held to improve student achievement performance (Coleman, 1966; U. S. Commission on Civil Rights, 1967), the question of whether school desegregation reduces the dropout rate of minority students is rarely studied. A variety of research suggests, however, that years of education completed is the most important determinant of occupational success; more important than family background, I.Q. or school grades. If the number of years of schooling completed is such an important determinant of mobility, then the decision to drop out of school represents as serious or more serious a barrier to future mobility as low achievement performance. This study evaluates the effects of school desegregation by court ordered busing for majority and minority student dropout behavior and investigates the relationship of school socio-economic composition and teachers' expectations with this hypothesized benefit of desegregation.

School dropout rates are utilized in this study to test some of the implications of the Equality of Educational Opportunity Survey (EEOS) (Coleman, 1966) and of recent Supreme Court decisions (Weinberg, 1970; U. S. Supreme Court, 1971) to desegregate schools as a remedy to the restricted educational opportunity of dual and/or segregated systems. Analogous to the EEOS conclusion that minority student achievement

performance is lower in segregated schools, this study expects to find higher minority student dropout rates in segregated schools. Analogous to the implication of the EEOS report, that desegregated schools may benefit minority student achievement, this study expects to find minority student dropout rates decrease with school desegregation.

The justification for this hypothesis rests with findings of research on the relationship between the racial composition of the school and attitudes of teachers. Coleman (1966:163, 165) reports teachers in segregated, predominantly black schools to perceive their students as having decidedly less academic interest and ability than white students. Such attitudes are part of a chain of variables leading to self-fulfilling prophecy behavior on the part of students. St. John (1975:95) reports on several studies which document the relationship between the teacher's perceptions of a student's ability, the student's perception of his ability, and the student's actual achievement performance. Thus, the negative expectations of teachers in segregated schools contribute to poor minority student achievement performance.

One of the major findings of a number of studies cited by the Civil Rights Commission (1967:112) points to changes in basic racial attitudes as a result of school desegregation, with black and white students and teachers reported as developing more favorable attitudes in integrated settings. Thus, we would expect the more favorable attitudes of teachers in desegregated schools to contribute to improved minority student achievement and satisfaction with school life. Another important factor which influences teachers' attitudes is the socio-economic composition of the school in which the teacher works. Coleman (1967) reports school socio-economic composition is the most important factor in the explanation of

positive educational experiences of minority students. As most of the segregated schools minority students attended in the EEOS may also be characterized as falling at the lower end of the socio-economic composition continuum, the effect of teachers' attitudes on minority student school experience needs to be jointly evaluated with school socio-economic composition. The hypothesis of this study is that with the influence of school socio-economic composition considered, the more favorable attitudes of teachers toward minority students in desegregated schools will be reflected in a more satisfying minority student school experience, which will decrease the minority student dropout rate.

SAMPLE AND METHODS

Data collected for this study are part of a larger four-year longitudinal panel study of majority and minority student achievement and self-concept in a southwestern community with a population which is approximately 65% anglo, 20% Black and 15% Mexican American. Data collected on school dropouts are for the 1970-1971 and 1974-1975 school years. Comparisons are made with a larger sample of 980 7th to 12th grade students, stratified by school, grade and race. During the summer of 1971, the federal court ordered the School District to bus 1600 minority students to previously all-white schools. Thus, majority and minority student dropout rates are available before and after three years of school desegregation. In addition to routine demographic and academic information available from school records, dropouts from both time periods were interviewed at home by a specially trained multi-ethnic team of interviewers to ascertain attitudinal variables, self-concept scores and gather information about inter-racial contact and attitudes. Teachers in all of the schools were also surveyed to provide data on staff attitudes, expectations and behavior.

FINDINGS

The overall 7th - 12th grade dropout rate in 1975 was 7.1% compared to 5.3% in 1971. While 1975 overall rates are higher than those in 1971, this increase is within the normal year-to-year rate fluctuations. The average annual dropout rate for the school system for the years 1965-1975 is 6.6% which is below the state 7.2% average for the same time periods. Table 1 presents dropout rates by student racial-ethnic status and by bused/non-bused school status for 1971 and 1975.

TABLE 1

There are 5 observations to be made from this table that are important to the subject of this paper. First, from the totals of the bottom row of the table, it is evident that Black and anglo rates are slightly higher in 1975 than in 1971 while Mexican American rates have declined. The decline in total anglo school population (4279 in 1971 to 2874 in 1975) indicates the degree to which "white flight" and urban to suburban mobility has affected city schools. Second, from the last column totals, the 1975 dropout rate comparison between bused and non-bused sectors of the city school district reveals no significant differences; which would lead one to conclude that overall dropout rates in bused sectors are not significantly lower or higher than those in non-bused sectors. Third, a comparison of the 1975 rates for anglos from bused and non-bused sectors reveals the anglo rate to be lower in bused sector schools, indicating there is no deleterious effect for anglo rates in newly desegregated schools. Fourth, a comparison of 1975 rates for Blacks and Mexican Americans in bused and non-bused sector schools indicates, contrary to our hypothesis, that minority dropout

rates are highest in the bused sectors. Fifth, closer inspection of the differential experience of both Black and Mexican American minority students within the two bused sectors reveals a large and substantial disparity between rates. Whereas the Black student dropout rate is only 6.6% in Sector 1, it is 16.6% in the other bused school sector, Sector 2. The disparity between sectors in non-bused school sectors is not nearly so high. Thus, we face a perplexing question. Even though the literature and previous research would lead one to expect lower dropout rates for minority students in the bused, desegregated sectors, the benefits of a more proportional racial-ethnic balance do not appear to exercise consistent effects for this sample of students.

Inspection of the relationship between teachers' attitudes and the racial composition of the school revealed no significant differences in the racial attitudes and/or expectations of behavior of minority students between teachers in bused sectors and teachers in non-bused sectors. While the lack of significant difference in teachers' attitudes in bused and non-bused schools may be associated with the lack of difference in dropout rates, such negative findings are hardly convincing argument. An answer to the inconsistency in this study's data is suggested in the EEOS (Coleman, 1966) socio-economic composition hypothesis. Both teachers' attitudes and minority student school experience may be highly influenced by the socio-economic composition of the school. Table 2 presents the relationship between school socio-economic composition and the attitudes of teachers and the minority students they teach.

TABLE 2

All differences in this composite table, indicating the relationship between school socio-economic climate and 3 measures, are statistically significant. Teachers in high socio-economic climate schools are more likely to hold more favorable perceptions of not only minority student academic ability, but of the very efforts they think the minority student is making. This finding is consistent with EEOS data and indicates the disparity between expectations of teachers in different social climate schools. The effect of such expectations is seen in column three of Table 2. The overwhelming majority of minority students in high socio-economic climate schools perceive their teachers as interested in them, their personal situation, and their educational experience. According to St. John (1975) and a variety of research studies cited by her, such expectational and perceptional differences should be manifest in differential academic performance and behavior.

Table 3 presents the relationship between school socio-economic composition and dropout behavior.

TABLE 3

While the type of analysis presented in these tables does not establish causality between factors, the relationships do reveal certain trends and provide support for the line of reasoning established earlier. Two observations are important to underscore with regards to Table 3. First, the data support the viability of the socio-economic composition hypothesis. Dropout rates decrease as one moves from low to high socio-economic climate schools. Second, 1975 student dropout rates indicate the effects of school socio-economic composition are more pronounced for the educational experiences of minority students than for majority students. Tables 2 and 3

provide support for the proposition that school socio-economic composition influences both teachers' attitudes, student attitudes and the educational experience of minority students.

Returning to our original focus on the relationship between school desegregation and minority student dropout behavior, the information from Tables 2 and 3 provides an explanation for the apparent lack of support for our original hypothesis. Table 4 presents the relationship between school desegregation and student dropout behavior controlled for school socio-economic composition and teachers' expectations.

TABLE 4

Dropout rates are generally lower for minority students attending higher socio-economic schools where teachers' expectations of behavior are more favorable. The lowest dropout rates for both bused and non-bused minority students occurs among those who are bused to higher socio-economic climate schools where teachers have high expectations. Highest minority student dropout rates also occur among those who are bused, but among those bused to lower socio-economic climate schools where teachers have low expectations of behavior. While the socio-economic climate of the school and the corresponding condition of teachers' expectations is also important to minority student dropout rates in non-bused sectors, it is the interaction between being bused to other than one's neighborhood school and school social climate that accounts for the disparity in minority student dropout rates in the bused sectors (table 1).

In an effort to ascertain the degree to which perceived educational quality has affected dropouts, an open ended question was asked of both the in-school sample and dropouts concerning what they considered a "quality" education to be. A content analysis of their responses, e.g. newer buildings, good library, top courses, etc., revealed the majority of answers of both groups to reflect socio-economic type indicators. Another question was asked of all respondents about the extent to which they considered the school they were or had been attending to meet their criteria of "Quality" education. Responses to this question are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5 *

Figures in the last column indicate a statistically significant greater number of students from the inschool sample perceive their schools as offering a "quality" education. Few of the dropouts perceive their schools in this way. Controls for school socio-economic climate and bused/non-bused sector status reveal dropouts have consistantly lower perceptions of the educational quality of their schools than students in school. Interestingly, the high socio-economic climate schools in the bused sectors are the most highly perceived as having a "quality" education and it is precisely at these schools that minority dropout rates are lowest.

CONCLUSIONS

As the research of Coleman (1966) and St. John (1975) indicate, school socio-economic climate and the more favorable expectations of behavior of teachers in higher climate schools is a fundamental determinant of successful minority student educational experience. The benefits of busing to achieve school desegregation and a more proportionate racial-ethnic balance are conditional upon the socio-economic climate and the climate of teachers' expectations of the school to which minority students are bused. If minority students are bused to high socio-economic climate schools with favorable expectations held by the teaching staff, the result appears to be a greatly reduced dropout rate. The research of Katz (1964) and Pettigrew (1971) provides an additional interpretation of the data of this study, suggesting that integrated schools provide new comparison levels for minority student aspiration and self-evaluation. Minority student perceptions of the socio-economic climate and the teachers' expectational climate of the school may be more influential for their behavior than the racial-ethnic composition of the school. Other possible contributions to lower rates in higher socio-economic climate schools, such as higher quality teaching staff and more adequate counseling programs, warrant additional research before definite conclusions can be reached.

The implications of this research for those concerned with extending an equal educational opportunity to all young people is readily apparent. The school's ability to motivate and equip its students to remain in school may well be the most basic dimension to the current effort to equalize social, economic and cultural differences and abilities of entering students. To desegregate schools through the use of busing in a manner in which minority students are bused to run-down, lower socio-economic climate

schools with teachers who hold mainly negative attitudes and expectations, simply for the sake of "racial balance," is of little benefit. The positive effects of attendance at desegregated schools for minority students is highly dependent on the quality of the school to which they are bused. It is incumbent upon those who make and carry out school desegregation policy to work to insure minority students are not penalized by subtle, institutionally racist attitudes and expectations of the teaching staff. St. John (1975:95) cites several programs that might be used to assist in raising the expectations of teachers for the academic performance of minority students. With such efforts, the positive effects of desegregation may be extended to all minority children and not, as this paper indicates is currently the case, just to those assigned to high socio-economic climate schools.

TABLE 1

DROPOUT RATES BY RACIAL-ETHNIC GROUP MEMBERSHIP AND BUSED/NON-BUSED SECTOR FOR 1971 AND 1975

Sector Status		Racial-Ethnic Group Membership						
		Anglo		Black		Mexican Amer.		Totals
		1971	1975	1971	1975	1971	1975	1975
Bused Sectors	Sector 1	2.5% (1972)	5.0% (909)	-	6.6% (452)	-	7.1% (44)	5.5% (1405)
	Sector 2	1.0% (309)	4.9% (577)	6.1% (651)	16.6% (320)	-	20.0% (45)	9.5% (942)
Bused Sector Averages		2.3% (2281)	5.0% (1486)	6.1% (651)	10.8% (772)	-	13.5% (89)	7.2% (2347)
Non-Bused Sectors	Sector 3	7.1% (889)	4.1% (632)	6.0% (186)	7.2% (277)	18.0% (228)	12.2% (74)	5.6% (983)
	Sector 4	5.5% (1109)	8.3% (756)	7.8% (64)	5.3% (302)	10.9% (329)	10.1% (317)	8.1% (1375)
Non-Bused Averages		6.2% (1998)	6.4% (1388)	6.4% (250)	6.2% (579)	13.8% (557)	10.5% (391)	7.1% (2358)
Totals		4.1% (4279)	5.6% (2874)	6.2% (901)	8.8% (1351)	13.8% (557)	11.2% (480)	7.1% (4705)

TABLE 2

TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF MINORITY STUDENT BEHAVIOR AND STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHER INTEREST BY SCHOOL SOCIO-ECONOMIC COMPOSITION

School Socio-Economic Composition	Teacher Ratings of Minority Student Academic Ability % Good or Excellent	Teacher Ratings of Minority Student Effort % Good or Excellent	Minority Student Ratings of Teachers' Interest % Interested
High SEC	52 % (78)	32% (78)	69% (832)
Low SEC	36% (80)	18% (80)	37% (999)
	Chi Square = 4.35 With 1 df Sig. = .04	Chi Square = 4.49 With 1 df Sig. = .04	Chi Square = 16.11 With 1 df Sig. = .000

TABLE 3

DROPOUT RATES FOR 1971 AND 1975 BY RACIAL-ETHNIC GROUP MEMBERSHIP AND SCHOOL SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLIMATE

School Socio-Economic Climate	Racial-Ethnic Group Membership						
	Anglo		Black		Mexican Amer.		Totals
	1971	1975	1971	1975	1971	1975	1975
High SEC	2.6% (2655)	5.4% (1215)	6.3% (107)	5.1% (607)	9.3% (163)	7.8% (244)	5.6% (2066)
Low SEC	6.7% (1624)	5.7% (1659)	6.3% (794)	11.7% (744)	15.7% (394)	14.8% (236)	8.2% (2639)
Totals	4.1% (4279)	5.6% (2874)	6.3% (901)	8.8% (1351)	13.8% (557)	11.2% (480)	7.1% (4705)
Chi Square With 1 df, Sig. =	42.75 .000	.114 .741	.92 .921	7.37 .008	4.13 .043	5.96 .018	6.96 .008

TABLE 4

DROPOUT RATES BY RACIAL-ETHNIC GROUP MEMBERSHIP AND BUSED/NON-BUSED SECTOR WITH SCHOOL SOCIO-ECONOMIC CLIMATE AND TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS CONTROLLED (1975 RATES ONLY)

Sector Status Bused/ Non-Bused	Teachers' Expectations/ School Socio- Economic Climate	Racial-Ethnic Group Membership: Anglo	Black	Mexican American	Totals
Bused Sectors	High	4.6% (1052)	5.1% (429)	7.1% (44)	4.8% (1525)
	Low	5.8% (434)	17.8% (343)	20.0% (45)	11.6% (822)
	Value of Chi Square =	.94	30.6	3.31	32.09
	With 1 df , Significance =	.390	.000	.073	.000
Non-Bused Sectors	High	3.9% (450)	5.3% (102)	9.3% (147)	5.2% (699)
	Low	7.6% (938)	6.5% (477)	10.5% (244)	8.3% (1659)
	Value of Chi Square =	6.4	1.39	.236	5.66
	With 1 df, Significance =	.014	.241	.652	.018

TABLE 5

COMPARISON OF STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF EDUCATIONAL QUALITY
BY SCHOOL STATUS AND SECTOR STATUS

School Sector:	Bused Sectors		Non-Bused Sectors		Average
Socio-Economic Climate	High SEC	Low SEC	High SEC	Low SEC	
Student's School Status					
Inschool	48% (1525)	22% (822)	31% (699)	28% (1659)	34% (4705)
Dropout	19% (73)	1% (95)	11% (37)	10% (138)	10% (343)
z Test	4.85	4.78	2.33	4.59	9.62
Significance	.000	.000	.02	.000	.000

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